
Title: The Midnite Orchid

Author: Herr Hauptmann

As dusk fell across
the forest, Falaris pause
at the edge of her glade
Grinning, he admonished
himself, 'Of course she'll
be happy to see me.'
Crossing the glade, he
was careful to keep to

the paths that meandered
through the space,
bringing the visitor close
to the plants she loved.
Though not too close,
where an errant hand
could pluck a blossom.
The path also kept

visitors far from the
plants she nurtured, still
in the budding stage, and
so fragile that a wayward
step could end months of
hard work.
Along the way, he too
note of what was out of

place in the carefully
planned pattern of green
beauty, and what could be
done to correct it. The
broken branches and dead
leaves could be gathered
up on the morrow and
placed in the compost

heap, while the smallest
rose bush appeared to be
suffering a blight. He'd
have to find a way to
separate it from the
others, while full removal
would have to wait until

"Beloved," he said, as
he sat down beside her.

Indeed, that was all that
needed to be said, as for
a while, Falaris was able
to relax in her presence,
content to listen to the
trees breathe, and watch

the rocks grow.
After a time, a
breathless hush fell over
the Garden of Her Heart
with a pang, Falaris
realized he had forgotten
that tonight would be the
calumny of her

efforts, if all the
attempts had been
anything more than a
waste of time. Tonight,
the midnight orchids would
blossom as never before.
The odds of a midnight
orchid blossoming in the

wild, or even in an
outdoor garden were
almost nonexistent. Even
in a hothouse, the
chances were hardly
better. And tonight, not
only would they blossom,
they would glow.

The late spring night
was warm, heavy with the
promise of an excellent
winter to come.

Even with his eyes roving
the clearing, alert for
signs, of what he did not

know, she was still aware
of the first delicate
orchids opening before
him. Soon after, he was
aware of his mistake, and
focused his gaze where
the orchids were not
growing, and gasped aloud

in wonder and delight.
The orchids, even as
they opened their pale
violet petals, began to
glow with a soft purple
light.

Across the glade, he
could see a pinprick of

light, that slowly grew
out, as first one flower
opened, then those
adjacent to it opened
soon after. Within ten
minutes time, the entire
glade was lit up in a
soft purple glow as all

the midnight orchids
unfurled their lavender
banners.

The wonder of it filled
his being, and his heart
beat in his chest as he
reached out to clasp the
hand of the woman he

loved...

And encountered the
cold marble of her tomb.

When his fingers
brushed the stone, he
came back to reality as

all around him, the lights
of the midnight orchids
faded into darkness. The
magic had ended, so
beautiful and pure, and s
very brief. The tragedy
of it would have broken
stone heart, wrenched

tears from the sternest
of men. But how can
you break what has
already shattered? Wee
long after tears have run
dry?

With a sob, he covered
the well of tears and

armored his heart once
more.

"Beloved," he said once
more. "On the morrow I
must leave for a time.
need to go to the Shrine
of Justice, the Justicars
there will direct me to

Rogan. I mean to bring

him in, and finally do
justice for his wrongs."
he paused for a moment,
as if listening to a reply
"I must leave on the
morrow to have a hope
of reaching them in time

for the Solstice in three
days. Only then will I
have the greatest chance
of success. I hope I can
return by the autumn
equinox."
Again he paused,
listening, "No, I wish to

stay here for the night."
Reaching out, he grasped
his mandolin from where
it lay on the ground. A
ever, it was in tune.
Settling himself again
a rock facing the marble,
he began to play, her

favorite song first as
always. A stately court
dance from her youth,
the strings lighting up hi
hand as he played 'The
Dance of the Seldarine'.
He was, he knew, one of
the few men who'd ever

learned to play even a
portion of the song; and
perhaps the only one who
was able to play 'The
Dance' without another
ten accompanying
musicians.
Falaris played long into

the night, finishing with
new song, 'The Glowing
Orchid', in which he
described the beauty of
this past night.
When he woke in the
morning, he was lying
down next to her tomb,

which was strangely warm
in the predawn chill.
Removing his boots,
Falaris pattered about
the glade, taking care of

that which he had noted
before.

Stopping to collect his

boots and mandolin,
Falaris knelt beside her
tomb, "I'll return soon
Mihalnya." he promised,
running his hand along the
stone.

Leaving the glade, he
noticed that the path

outward had changed
dramatically, weaving back
and forth, as if to delay
his departure, while he,
with many a backward
glance and a heavy heart,
continued onward.
Stopping at the edge of

the glade, just outside
the shadows of the
trees, he turned for one
last look and farewell,
and saw, sitting in the
shadows, an orchid.
Picking it up, he saw
with amazement, that the

blossom had been neither
cut nor picked, for the
stem ended smoothly.
Furthermore, it was one
of the midnight orchids,
glowing faintly in the
shade. Impossibly so, he
marveled, for the orchids

he knew bloomed for only
a few minutes a few
minutes a year, if that,
and even then, only at
night.

With a lighter heart,
Herr Hauptmann set the
incredible orchid in the

clasp of his cloak, and
headed south, where the
Shrine of Justice, and his
vengeance, awaited.